

"The Risen Christ"

"An Insult to Christianity and Art"
and a "Horror in Bronze,"
the Criticism of Sculptor Epstein's
Extraordinary Statue
Which Has Stirred
Up All England

From Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper. One of the Most Famous Conceptions of the Saviour.

The Head of Epstein's "Christ."

THE religious world has been stirred this Easter season by an extraordinary statue in the great Leicester Galleries in London, executed by one of the foremost sculptors of Europe. It is called "The Risen Christ" and is from the hand of Jacob Epstein.

"Every man has his own Christ," Mr. Epstein explains. "I have tried to express my idea of Christ in bronze. No one sat to me as a model. The head is not a racial head. It is neither Jewish nor European. The hands are emphasized slightly because the main point to my mind is His suffering."

What a conception of the Saviour!

Those who saw the statue turned away in indignant protest and the criticism and comment have been varied and emphatic.

"Epstein's statue," one clergyman remarked, "is like an insult to Christianity and to art. With one side of the head apparently shaved off, an overdone sneer on the crooked, ill-formed mouth, and a genuine in the faultily modelled eyes, with the hands of a giant and the body of a mummy, the whole thing is an insult."

Another critic declared that:

"If Epstein had made this statue and lived at the time of Torquemada and the inquisition the sculptor would have ended his career by being burned at the stake. The head is elongated and of a negroid type. Nothing could be less Christlike, and yet there is nothing irreverent about it."

Another student of art and Scripture had this to say:

"He has conceived a young Christ, not emaciated as that of Mestrovic, but gaunt,

ascetic, with a slight suggestion of the Mongolian in type."

Other opinions by distinguished clergymen are printed on this page.

As Christless as Rameses—

THE statue of Christ by Epstein is, to my mind, another example of the erratic tendencies of some of our modern artists, who seem to labor under the impression that originality is not only essential in art, but that originality and eccentricity are synonymous. In the statue of Christ I see neither an attempt at realism nor a successful effort in idealism; and when both of these qualifications are conspicuously absent in any work of art, as in this case, then art becomes a masque for caricature, buffoonery and often vulgarity.

The purely realistic products of Tassot and the idealistic as well as the realistic-idealistic works of most of the old Italian

A Brutal Jesus—

THIS supposed statue of Jesus by Jacob Epstein is impossible because it cannot, by any manner of thinking, be a real representation of Jesus. In striving to be original the sculptor has simply gone back to the primitively brutal, and Jesus was anything but primitive and in absolute contradiction to all that is brutal. The artist was evidently straining to bring out the point that his martyrdom was the essential feature of the life of Jesus, but even if this be true, the figure, the face, the hands and posture are in direct contradiction to all that the world has conceived as to the personality of Jesus.

It would be a pity indeed if any one were to think that because Sculptor Epstein is of Jewish birth that he has embodied the Jewish conception or perception of Jesus. It is his own personal attempt at an interpretation which will be rejected by the Jew just as quickly and decidedly as by the Christian.

A Wicked Travesty—By Rev. Father Bernard Vaughan.

THE conception which we all have today of the Christ differs in detail only from the fresco, say, in the catacomb of St. Peter and Marcellinus, of which Wilpert writes: "The painter aimed at creating not a mere bearded head, but, to the best of his ability, an image of the God-Man; the high forehead, the almond eyes shadowed by dark eyebrows, the fine nose, the mouth open as though to speak, the long pointed beard, the beautiful oval face and the long chestnut ringlets of the hair form a majestic, highly characteristic head, whose dignity is enhanced by the purple garments."

Here, in the description of a fresco of the fifth century, you might almost bring yourself to believe you were reading one borrowed from Giotto's portrait of his Divine Master in the thirteenth century.

Since Cimabue's day till our own Holman Hunt's sculptors and artists have followed the traditional ideal about the features and expression of our Divine Lord. No artist, not even the saintly Fra Angelico, dared to innovate upon what was handed down as the embodiment, as far as might be, of the Divine character which has been revealed to us by tradition and in the Gospel stories.

Any "portrait" of Our Lord that fails to express tenderness, dignity, calmness and sweetness, with overwhelming majesty—in a word, any so-called "likeness" which does not manifest a countenance in which are united an expression intensely human, yet altogether Divine, must be ruthlessly set aside as stunning against the canons of correct taste and as running counter to the conceptions which even non-Christians, as well as Christians, have formed of the unique character of Jesus Christ.

Listen to this conception of opinion with regard to Christ's surpassing goodness and greatness. Before Him Kant feels constrained to bow as "the ideal of perfection;" in Him Hegel sees "the union of the Divine and the Human;" in Him, again, Spinoza recognizes "the symbol of Divine Wisdom." To the scoffing Roman Jesus Christ "is the most beautiful incarnation of God in the most beautiful of human forms." Of Him Napoleon said, "I know men. I tell you Jesus Christ was not a mere man."

To the German Strauss Our Lord "is the brightest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion, the Being without whose presence in the mind perfect piety is impossible." To Lecky, our British historian, Jesus Christ is "the highest

pattern of virtue and the strongest incentive to its practice," while to John Stuart Mill Christ "is charged with a special express and unique mission from God to lead mankind to truth and virtue."

With this established tradition, profane as well as sacred, literary as well as artistic, about the pre-eminent character and riveting personality of Jesus Christ, one could not, in wildest dreams, imagine any self-respecting artist to quarrel, still less to be so insolent as to strike out of metal a figure of the Risen Christ in which neither the man in the street nor the normal artist can discover any redeeming feature. Yet this has been done, and the painful result may be seen in Mr. Epstein's work, which is being exhibited at the Leicester Galleries, Leicester Square, London.

I have stood in front and at the back elevation of this gross and grotesque thing, with nose turned up and feet turned in; I have stood on the right and the left of this offending and hurting caricature; I have studied the unshapely head, the receding brow, the thick lips, the upturned nose, the uncanny eyes, the poorly built body, with its ugly feet and uglier hands, till I felt ready to cry out with indignation that in this Christian England there

should be exhibited the figure of a Christ which suggested to me some degraded Chaldean or African, which wore the appearance of an Asiatic-American or Hun-Jew, which reminded me of some emaciated Hindu, or a badly grown Egyptian swathed in the ceremonies of the grave.

I call it positively wicked and insulting to perpetrate such a travesty of the Risen Christ and to invite a Christian people, to whom the Founder of Christianity is the Man-God, to come and admire it.

Who is the man who, standing in presence of this shapeless specimen of humanity, could imagine coming forth from its brutally thick throat the words, "I am the Light of the World," or "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life," or "I am the Resurrection and the Life," or, lastly, "I am thy reward exceeding great?"

Someone has observed that if a hero were to come into a room we should stand up and acclaim him, and if Christ should cross the threshold we should kneel down and adore Him; but let me add, if Mr. Epstein's horror in bronze were to spring into life and appear in a room, I for one should fly from it in dread and disgust, lest perhaps he might pick my pockets, or, worse, do some deed of violence in keeping with his Bolshevik appearance.

The Sculptor's Explanation

By Jacob Epstein.

Every man has his own Christ. I have tried to express my idea of Christ in bronze. No one sat to me as a model. The head is not a racial head. It is neither Jewish nor European. The hands are emphasized slightly, because the main point, to my mind, is His suffering.

By Father Gabriel Oussani, Ph. D.,

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and Flemish schools in this regard have not been surpassed as yet, nor are they likely to be surpassed, or even approached, if Epstein's ideas and those of others with similar tendencies are to prevail.

To my mind this portrait of Christ is as Christless as that of the mummy of Rameses II. and as Godless as the full-bearded image of King Assurbanipal. It inspires one neither with confidence nor admiration nor fear nor love nor affection for the Saviour of Mankind. "Repulsive" and "eccentric" are the only appropriate terms I can think of in looking at Epstein's erratic work.

By Rabbi Clifton Harby Levy,

People's Temple, New York.

The Jew has a fine conception of Jesus, even though he may not and does not accept Jesus as the Messiah or the Son of God. Especially the liberal Jew of to-day thinks of Jesus as a great leader of men who had some fine work to do among men, and did it unflinchingly. The Jew considers the New Testament Jewish literature, for it was written by Jews for Jewish Christians first, and later became world-literature together with the Old Testament.

The Jew, therefore, would put aside this statue of Jesus as repellent, a poor expression of the ideals which have clustered around the personality of Him whom he regards as one of the great Jews of history. He will regret that any such statue was ever made, and would refuse to have it set up as more than the conception of a single individual, and that an artist straining after an unusual effect. It does not seem to him either art or truth, and unless a statue be both of these it will be rejected by all who think or feel. It is a pity that it was ever made.

The Full Statue of "The Risen Christ."